Jacob Ris REVEALING "HOW THE OTHER HALF LIVES"

A Library of Congress Exhibition April 14–September 5, 2016 Thomas Jefferson Building Jacob A. Riis (1849–1914) was a journalist and social reformer who publicized the crises in housing, education, and poverty at the height of European immigration to New York City in the late nineteenth century. His career as a reformer was shaped by his innovative use of photographs of New York's slums to substantiate his words and vividly expose the realities of squalid living and working conditions faced by the inhabitants. Harrowing images of tenements and alleyways where New York's immigrant communities lived, combined with his evocative storytelling, were intended to engage and inform his audience and exhort them to act. Riis helped set in motion an activist legacy linking photojournalism with reform.

This exhibition repositions Riis as a multi-skilled communicator who devoted his life to writing articles and books, delivering lectures nationwide, and doggedly advocating for social change. *Jacob Riis: Revealing "How the Other Half Lives"* features Riis's correspondence, documentary photographs, drafts and published works, lecture notes, scrapbook pages, appointment books, financial records, family history, and alliances from throughout his career. The side walls of the exhibition frame Riis's call to action on problems he focused on as a reporter—housing, homelessness, public space, immigration, education, crime, public health, and labor. These pressing issues remain at the forefront of many public debates today.

By merging, for the first time, the papers the Riis family gifted to the Library of Congress and his photographs in the collection of the Museum of the City of New York, *Jacob Riis: Revealing "How the Other Half Lives"* provides visitors with an unprecedented opportunity to understand the indelible mark Riis's brand of social reform left upon our vision of humanity and poverty in the urban landscape as the Gilded Age shifted into the Progressive Era.

COVER IMAGE

Jacob Riis. Detail of *"I Scrubs"—Little Katie from the West 52nd Street Industrial School*, 1891–1892. Modern gelatin printing out paper. Museum of the City of New York, Gift of Roger William Riis (90.13.4.132) (086.00.00)





Biography

Jacob A. Riis (1849–1914) was born in Ribe, Denmark. He immigrated to America at age twenty with hopes of one day marrying his teenage love, Elisabeth Nielsen [Gjørtz]. Riis wandered through Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York, taking odd jobs as a laborer and salesman, before landing newspaper work in New York City in 1873. Financially established, Riis won Elisabeth's hand; they married in Ribe in 1876 and settled in New York, where they raised five children.



Riis recounted his remarkable life story in *The Making of an American*, his second national best seller. In it, he chronicled his years as a homeless immigrant, his love story with his wife, and his enduring friendship with Theodore Roosevelt, who had become president of the United States only months before the book's publication in 1901.

ABOVE

Frances Benjamin Johnston, photographer. *Jacob August Riis*, ca. 1895. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress (046.00.00)

OPPOSIT

Jacob Riis. "Our family taken in summer of 1898." Detail from glass plate negative. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress (045.00.00)

HARPER'S WEEKLY - Schney 3. 1900 104



the benth, confort, and happiness of the vast majority of the people in modern cities, and therefore always timely for discussion. It would be a good thing for New York if heed had been played to the cover-crowding of our tenement-house quarters—due to the cover-crowding of our tenement of the cover-crowding of our tenement of the cover-crowding of our tenement of the cover-crowding of the

for, and showed that such tenements could be made to pay.

New York is not nearly yet a deen city. Just now, in yoursalt of the programme of its present rulers, it has pursuit of the programme of its present rulers, it has pursuit of the programme of the property of the programme of the programme of the programme of the property of



A DOUBLE AIR-SHAFT.

begun win the Fenement.

When the exhibits have been shown in turn to the When the Avenue whose money built the tenements, and to the people of the East Side who live in them, they will thin cross the ocean in time for the Paris Exposition. Eventually they are to find a permanent home in this city, where the committee will contuin the two ker of clucation and of appeal to the public conscience.



THE MULBERRY BEND PARK, NEW YORK,



THE RIVERSIDE TENEMENTS, BROOKLYN

Reporter

For twenty-three years, Riis worked for the New York Tribune and the Evening Sun from an office at 301 Mulberry Street across from police headquarters in the heart of the Lower East Side. Six of those years were spent working nights on the police beat, witnessing criminality and deprivation and gaining an intricate knowledge of street life.

With his Danish accent and crusader views, Riis was an outsider among his fellow journalists. He proved his mettle, however, and became the "boss reporter." Writing in a sentimental vet critical style similar to Charles Dickens, he was unvielding in his depiction of the vices, travails, and efforts of the urban poor. From the start of his work in journalism, he used the personal stories of the slum dwellers he met to paint a vivid picture of what it was like to inhabit the city's tenement neighborhoods.



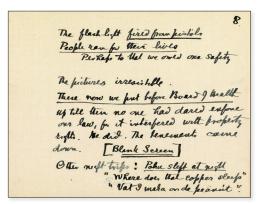
Jacob Riis, Richard Hoe Lawrence, and Dr. Henry G. Piffard. "Our office—my partner, Mr. Ensign at the desk, I in the corner," New York Tribune Police Bureau, 1887–1888. Gelatin silver photograph. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress (029.01.00)

Jacob Riis. "The Tenement House Exhibition." Harper's Weekly, February 3, 1900. Jacob A. Riis Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (006.00.00)



Photographer

Jacob A. Riis's success as an agent of reform derived not only from his passionate advocacy in print and on the lecture circuit but from his innovative use of the media of his time. He was the first reformer to recognize the potential in new methods of low-light flash photography. He used photographs of squalid conditions in the poorest parts of New York City to convince middle-class audiences of the need for action. Describing himself as a "photographer after a fashion," he first guided avid amateur photographers willing to test new flash techniques to take nighttime pictures in the slums. Soon Riis began taking photos on his own, letting commercial firms do the darkroom work. The 100 images he assembled for his "Other Half" lecture slides were powerful persuaders, but the impact of those pictures was diminished in print because 1890s printing technology dictated that images be reproduced as crude wood engravings or tonally flat halftones.



ABOVE

Jacob Riis. "The Making of an American," handwritten lecture notes. Jacob A. Riis Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (019.00.00)

OPPOSIT

Jacob Riis. Detail of *Five-Cent Spot*, 1888–1889. Modern gelatin printing out paper. Museum of the City of New York. Gift of Roger William Riis (90.13.4.158) (061.00.00)

"One Half the World does not know how the other Half Lives."

THE OTHER HALF,

HOW IT LIVES AND DIES IN NEW YORK.

WITH ONE HUNDRED ILLUSTRATIONS, PHOTOGRAPHS FROM REAL LIFE, OF THE HAUNTS OF POVERTY AND VICE IN THE GREAT CITY.

—BY—

JACOB A. RIIS,

FOR MANY YEARS THE POLICE REPORTER OF THE NEW YORK
TRIBUNE AND THE ASSOCIATED PRESS AT
POLICE HEADQUARTERS.

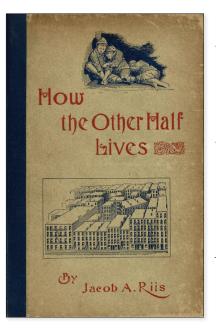
NEW YORK.

1888.

This was my when I a hitle page a year before I thought of begranny the book , It was so copy righted

Writer

Jacob Riis wrote his first (and now enduringly famous) book, *How the Other Half Lives* (1890) late at night "while the house slept." He recalled: "It was my habit to light the lamps in all the rooms of the lower story and roam through them with my pipe, for I do most of my writing on my feet." The book was a bestseller. Riis continued to pursue his activism through writing. His long stint as a police reporter, first with the *New*



York Tribune and then the New York Evening Sun, ended in 1901, but Riis continued to produce a stream of freelance articles for newspapers and literary magazines like Scribner's, the Century, and the Churchman. He also published nearly a dozen influential books involving urban reform, including The Children of the Poor (1892), A Ten Years' War (1900), The Making of an American (1901), and The Battle with the Slum (1902).

ABOVE

Jacob Riis. *How the Other Half Lives, Studies Among the Tenements of New York.* New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1890. Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (063.00.00)

OPPOSIT

Title page submitted for U.S. Copyright, 1888. Jacob A. Riis Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (022.00.01)

TWO PAGE SPREAD

Jacob Riis. "How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the Tenements," *Scribner's Magazine*, December 1889. General Collections, Library of Congress (059.00.00)

651

swarming with unwholesome crowds.

grant from southern Italy in exclusive no word of English—upon such scenes possession of this field, just as his black- as the one presented in the picture. eyed boy has monopolized the boot- It was photographed by flash-light black's trade, the Chinaman the laundry, on just such a visit. In a room not and the negro the razor for purposes of thirteen feet either way slept twelve honest industry as well as anatomical men and women, two or three in bunks research. Here is the back alley in its set in a sort of alcove, the rest on the foulest development-naturally enough, floor. A kerosene lamp burned dimly for there is scarcely a lot that has not in the fearful atmosphere, probably to two, three, or four tenements upon it, guide other and later arrivals to their "beds," for it was only just past mid-What squalor and degradation inhabit night. A baby's fretful wail came from



Lodgers in a Crowded Bayard Street Tenement-" Five cents a spot."

these dens the health officers know. an adjoining hall-room, where, in the Through the long summer days their semi-darkness, three recumbent figures carts patrol The Bend, scattering disin- could be made out. The "apartment" fectants in streets and lanes, in sinks was one of three in two adjoining buildtramp burrows. From midnight till similarly crowded. Most of the men the policeman's thundering rap on closed doors is heard, with his stern command, tenant knows it even if he understands opened the door with alacrity, and ex-

and cellars, and hidden hovels where the ings we had found, within half an hour, far into the small hours of the morning were lodgers, who slept there for five cents a spot.

Another room on the top floor, that "Apri port'!" on his rounds gathering had been examined a few nights before, evidence of illegal overcrowding. The was comparatively empty. There were doors are opened unwillingly enough- only four persons in it, two men, an old but the order means business and the woman, and a young girl. The landlord



HOW THE OTHER HALF LIVES.

An All-night Two-cent Restaurant, in "The Bend."

interests to satisfy the law. Our visit had been anticipated. The policeman's back was probably no sooner turned than the room was reopened for business.

Of the vast homeless crowds the census takes no account. It is their instinct to shun the light, and they cannot be coralled in one place long enough

to be counted. But the houses can, and the last count showed that in "The Bend district," between Broadway and the Bowery and Canal and Chatham Streets, in a total of nearly four thousand four hundred "apartments," only nine were for the moment vacant. West of Broadway, in the old "Africa" that receives the overflow from The Bend and is rapidly changing its character (the colored population moving uptown before the tide of Italian immigration and the onward

hibited with a proud sweep of his hand is up. Not a single vacant room was the sacrifice he had made of his personal found there. The problem of the children becomes, in these swarms, to the last degree perplexing. It is not unusual to find half a hundred in a single tenement. I have counted as many as one hundred and thirty-six in two adjoining houses in Crosby Street.

There was a big tenement in the Sixth Ward, now happily in process of being appropriated by the beneficent spirit of



In a Chinese Joint,

march of business-an odd co-partner- business that blots out so many foul ship), the notice "standing-room only" spots in New York-it figured not long



Reformer

Based on his own experiences as an immigrant and his knowledge of the slums as a police reporter, Riis advocated for practical solutions to a wide array of social problems. Through lectures, newspaper and magazine articles, and books like *How the Other Half* Lives (1890) and The Children of the Poor (1892), Riis worked tirelessly to influence public opinion. He met with a hostile reception from New York City's powerful political machine, Tammany Hall, whose leaders saw well-meaning, middle-class reformers as a threat to their influence. But in 1894, an anti-Tammany reform candidate, William L. Strong, won the mayor's office and instituted a period of "good government" policies. Among Strong's appointments was a young Theodore Roosevelt as police commissioner. Roosevelt befriended Riis and supported his causes, as Riis advocated for the destruction of the worst of the old tenements, the construction of parks, education for



children, and the closing of the dangerous police station lodging houses.

ABOVE

Jacob Riis. *The First Patriotic Election in the Beach Street Industrial School*, 1891–1892. Modern gelatin printing out paper. Museum of the City of New York, Gift of Roger William Riis (90.13.4.208) (033.00.00)

OPPOSIT

Jacob Riis. Detail of *Saluting the Flag in the Mott Street Industrial School*, 1891–1892. Gelatin silver transparency hand-colored by William T. Gregg. Museum of the City of New York, Gift of Roger William Riis (90.13.2.97) (087.00.00)

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Lecturer

By 1900, Riis was a national authority on urban poverty. The lure of the lecture circuit was more than financial. His fame allowed him to retire as a police reporter in 1901 and rely on lecturing as his primary source of income. For several months out of the year, he crisscrossed the country, even after a serious heart attack in 1900 and against doctor's orders. Riis's 1901 autobiography The Making of an American, in which he regaled readers with accounts of the degrading experiences of his early years as a struggling immigrant, consolidated his status as a celebrity and resonated with audiences across the country. A newspaper account of Riis's 1911 lecture in San Jose, California, noted: "Simply as the story was told, it held the listeners wrapt. 'If,' said [Riis] in closing, 'the story of one plain immigrant lad helps you to look with kind eyes on one little unfortunate lad I shall think my words well spoken."





ABOVE

Picture postcards sent by Riis from New Hampshire and the District of Columbia to family members, 1905 and 1908. Jacob A. Riis Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (078–079.00.00)

OPPOSITE

Jacob Riis's appointment book, February 14–20, 1909. Jacob A. Riis Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (070.00.00)

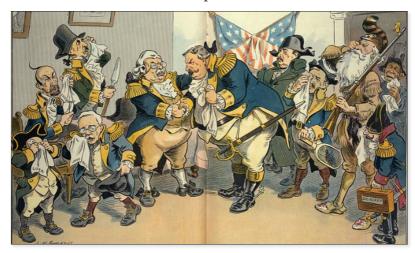
JACOB A. RIIS, 524 BEECH STREET, NORTH, RICHMOND HILL, BOR. OF QUEENS.

NEW YORK, Afril 190 2

by dear him Wasting line. I am goy to see Frender Herault witwel alas that island bunness. I will not go there under di a clear dut, and Jan not see it to. If h any dance I do, be sen I mile go to you for much information, for I shall need it. That two, will be a good chance of our muly at last. Poul white I do a vol, court me in always in any Effort to roue un all blad and whit; toward In ideal you and I both parme and will, I Kope, b the End. Know no deall I you but tantimes I alward with the End were near but me lest I slip and card infront on much I four come to standy - Sou your card in front on much I four come to standy - Sour Jacobo Rii.

Ally

Jacob Riis's career-long "battle with the slum" was aided through acquaintances and friendships with political and affluent allies—the most powerful being Theodore Roosevelt. Their deep friendship began in 1895 when then Police Commissioner Roosevelt sought out Riis in his newspaper office across from police headquarters on Mulberry Street. Riis took the commissioner on a series of nighttime forays into the slums and used the relationship to make recommendations for reform of the police and health departments, many of which Roosevelt embraced. Over time their bond strengthened, even after Roosevelt left the city to climb the rungs from a state to a national political career. The two men supported each other publicly-artfully using the media to enhance their mutual reputations.



ABOVE

Louis M. Glackens (1866–1933). "Roosevelt's Farewell to His Officers" from *Puck*, February 26, 1908. Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress (092.00.00)

OPPOSITE

Jacob Riis to Booker T. Washington (1856–1915), April 11, 1902. Manuscript letter. Booker T. Washington Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (097.00.00)



Legacy

Riis often said he was not alone in pressing for urban reform. As the Gilded Age ended, his sentimental appeals to Christian empathy were eclipsed by more organized means to combat poverty. New college-educated Progressive reformers saw unionization, woman suffrage, protective legislation, and government intervention as ways to achieve far-reaching social change. But Riis had pioneered techniques utilized in the new emerging fields of social work, investigative journalism, and photojournalism. His fieldwork in the streets; case studies of the ill and poor; documentation with a camera; use of public relations; interest in statistics; and close association with government authorities and health officers, all laid groundwork for what was to come.



When on May 25, 1914, Riis died of heart disease at age 65, Lillian Wald, founder of the Henry Street Settlement, eulogized him "for friendship and encouragement and spirited fellowship, for opening up the hearts of a people to emotion, and for the knowledge upon which to guide that emotion into constructive channels."

ABOVE

Nellie Simmons Meier (d. 1939). 1903 print of Jacob Riis's right hand with signature published in *Lions' Paws, The Story of Famous Hands*. New York, 1937. Nellie Simmons Meier Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (098.00.00)

OPPOSIT

Lewis Hine (1874–1940). "Photographic Investigation of Child Labor Conditions in Sardine Canneries of Maine, August 1911." Gelatin silver photograph. Papers of the National Child Labor Committee, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (105.00.00)

Acknowledgments

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The exhibition is based on Jacob A. Riis: Revealing New York's Other Half, curated by Bonnie Yochelson presented by the Museum of the City of New York, from October 14, 2015–March 20, 2016. A third version of the exhibition will travel to Denmark in 2016 and 2017: GL Strand Kunstforeningen (Copenhagen) and the Kunstmuseum (Ribe).

The Library extends its sincere thanks to the following individuals for their assistance in the realization of this exhibition: Bonnie Yochelson; Jette Renneberg Elkjær, Cultural Attachè, Royal Danish Embassy; William Jacobs; Sarah Henry, Becky Laughner, Winona Packer, Miranda Hambro, Museum of the City of New York; Terry Borton, American Magic-Lantern Theater; Adrianne Rubin, Mary Yearwood, Thomas Lannon, New York Public Library; Richard Morange, New England Photographic History Society; Helen Harrison; and Mark Osterman, Todd Gustavson, George Eastman Museum

Exhibition and Brochure Design

Shveima Associates

Online Exhibition

This exhibition is available online at www.loc.gov/exhibits/jacob-riis/

Public Programs

A list of Public Programs for youth and adult audiences, including lectures, films, and special presentations, are listed in the online exhibition and updated as new programs are added: www.loc.gov/exhibits/jacob-riis/public-programs

Through the generosity of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, the Danish Ministry of Culture, the Danish Agency for Culture and Palaces, and The Royal Danish Embassy, a family guide, designed for younger visitors, ages 8+ and their families, features a series of age-appropriate, self-guided activities. The guide encourages users to explore the exhibition, look closely, ask questions, and reflect on how they might affect change in our world today.

A hands-on learning cart invites visitors of all ages to investigate late nineteenth/early-twentieth-century photographic equipment and processes that bring to life the stories behind the creation of Riis's work. Stationed inside the exhibition, cart facilitators engage visitors with artifacts and related materials to highlight Riis's experiences and the conditions he documented.

Read More About It

Books by Riis

Riis, Jacob A. *The Children of the Poor*. New York: Garrett Press, 1970.
Originally published 1892.

____. How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1971. Originally published 1890.

____. The Making of an American. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1970. Originally published 1901.

Books about Riis

Alland, Alexander, Sr. *Jacob A. Riis: Photographer & Citizen*. New York: Aperture, 1973.

Buk-Swienty, Tom. The Other Half: The Life of Jacob Riis and the World of Immigrant America. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008.

Yochelson, Bonnie. Jacob A. Riis: Revealing New York's Other Half: A Complete Catalogue of His Photographs. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014.

Yochelson, Bonnie and Daniel Czitrom. Rediscovering Jacob Riis: Exposure Journalism and Photography in Turn-of-the-Century New York. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014.

For Young Readers

Hopkinson, Deborah. Shutting out the Sky, Life in the Tenements of New York 1880–1924. New York: Orchard Books, An imprint of Scholastic, Inc., 2003.

Meyer, Edith Patterson. "Not Charity, but Justice": The Story of Jacob A. Riis. New York: Vanguard Press, 1974.

Pascal, Janet B. *Jacob Riis, Reporter* and *Reformer*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Companion Volume

Jacob A. Riis: Revealing New York's Other Half is the first comprehensive study and complete catalogue of Jacob Riis's photographs and is the culmination of more than two decades of research on Riis by photographic historian Bonnie Yochelson; published by Yale University Press in association with the Museum of the City of New York and the Library of Congress. The book is supported by the Phillip and Edith Leonian Foundation.

Jacob Riis REVEALING "HOW THE OTHER HALF LIVES"

is a co-presentation of the Library of Congress and the Museum of the City of New York.

This exhibition unites, for the first time, the Jacob A. Riis Papers from the Library of Congress and the Museum of the City of New York's Jacob A. Riis Collection of Riis's photographs.

The exhibition and its related programming at the Library of Congress are made possible by:

The Library of Congress Third Century Fund

Queen Margrethe and Prince Henrik's Foundation

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, Danish Ministry of Culture, and Danish Agency for Culture and Palaces

The Royal Danish Embassy

The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation

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